



PRESS RELEASE

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS SMASHED CIGARETTE SMUGGLING SYNDICATE – 4 SINGAPOREAN MEN ARRESTED AND 6177 CARTONS CONTRABAND CIGARETTES SEIZED

Singapore Customs smashed a cigarette smuggling syndicate in a stakeout on 14 Nov 2005. Four male Singaporeans, aged 37 to 51, were arrested and 6,177 cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes seized from two Singapore-registered bonded trucks and a taxi. The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$679,500 and the total duty and GST payable is \$462,700.

2 On 14 Nov 2005, Customs Special Investigations Branch officers kept watch on a bonded truck parked at a secluded spot, off Bah Soon Pah Road. On the same day at about 3.30 pm, the officers saw a taxi followed by a car and then a van arriving at the location. The driver of the car alighted and went to unlock the door to the cargo compartment of the truck. He removed two boxes and loaded them into the boot of the taxi. The taxi then sped off. Customs officers trailed the taxi and eventually intercepted it along Yishun Ave 1. In the car boot were 100 cartons of contraband cigarettes. The driver, aged 51, was arrested.

3 Meanwhile, at the Bah Soon Pah location, another bonded truck arrived and parked near the first truck. The Customs team keeping watch at the vicinity, moved in to inspect the vehicles. A total of 2,494 cartons of contraband cigarettes were found in the cargo compartment of the first vehicle. The two men, aged 37 and 43, were arrested immediately. When questioned, the driver of the second truck claimed that he was carrying fertilizers for the nearby nurseries. However, a check on his bonded truck revealed 3,583 cartons of contraband cigarettes. The truck driver, aged 51, was also arrested.

4 Investigations revealed that the four men were part of a cigarettes smuggling syndicate network. The two bonded trucks were rented for storage of contraband cigarettes. The cigarettes seized were meant for distribution to factories, construction sites and dormitories of foreign workers. The men will be charged in court on 16 Nov 2005 for offences under the Customs Act.

5 Singapore Customs warn that the storing, possession, conveying or dealing with any contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs Act. Singapore Customs takes a serious view of any attempt to evade duty and tax and will not hesitate to prosecute offenders in court. Upon conviction by the court, first time offenders can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of duty evaded. For second or subsequent convictions, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The offenders also face further fines based on the amount of GST evaded.

6 Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of customs duty or GST can contact Singapore Customs Intelligence Hotline on 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg.